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# Karikala and His Times.

BY K. V. SUBRAHMANYA AIYER, B.A.; OOTACAMUND.

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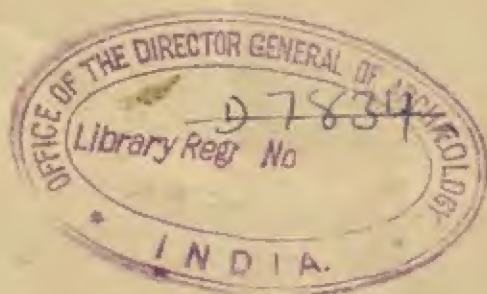


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## KARIKALA AND HIS TIMES.

BY K. V. SUBRAHMANYA AIYER, B. A.; OOTACAMUND.

ONE of the oldest cities of Southern India is Kāvīrippāmpaṭṭinam. It is situated on the sea coast, 12 miles south-east of Shiyali in the Tanjore district.<sup>1</sup> In ancient times it also bore the name Puḡār. That it was near the mouth of the river Kāvēri and had in it the temples of Śāyāvanam and Pallavanīśvaram are recorded in the *Dēdram* songs.<sup>2</sup> Ancient Tamil literature abounds in references to this old city and these show that it was a place of considerable size and importance in early times. Excluding the authors of the *Dēdram*, the poets that give a glowing description of the place, the wealth of the town, the pleasures and pastimes of its inhabitants and the busy trade which it kept up with the outside world and the inland countries, are not few. Chief among them may be mentioned the Chēra prince Ilaṅgōvaḍigaḷ, the author of *Silappadigāram*; Sittalai Sāttanār who composed the *Maṇimēgalai*; Rudraṅkaṇṇār and Nappūdanār, the authors of three of the poems in the collection known as *Pattup-ṭṭu*. There are evidences in these writings to show that some of the authors visited the place which they described, while others were its inhabitants.

Not long after the time of the Saiva saints, Nānasambandar and Appar, who are assigned to the middle of the 7th century A. D., the sea washed away the whole town with its boasted splendour and glory. It was about this time that the Chinese pilgrim, Hinen Tsiang, visited many of the important places of Southern India. This town should certainly have been one of them if it had then been in existence, but its identity with the southern Charitrapura, as some take it, is doubtful. There are grounds to suppose that even in earlier times, there was an encroachment of the sea on this portion of the east coast, when other places seem to have been submerged in the ocean. We may perhaps trace an allusion to such an inundation in the name Tōḡipuram by which the town of Shiyali was known in early times. In their hymns on Tirukkaḷumalam, Nānasambandar and Appar state in clear terms that it once floated like a boat in the water of the sea. Several villages were destroyed, but Tōḡipuram is said to have survived the effects of the event.<sup>3</sup> The foundations of the original city of Kāvīrippāmpaṭṭinam must have been laid long after the first inundation but when it was founded, how long it thrived as the principal town of the Chōḷa empire and who the sovereigns were that ruled over it, are facts yet to be ascertained. The Greek geographer, Ptolemy, who flourished in the second century A. D. speaks of *Chabaris Emporium* and this has been taken to refer to the port of Kāvīrippāmpaṭṭinam. After the destruction of the city by the encroachment of the sea perhaps at the close of the 7th century A. D., it seems to have been refounded and been again

<sup>1</sup> Sewall's *Lists of Antiquities*, I, p. 272

<sup>2</sup> The references that 'Pōṇṇi iḷḡaramēu śāykkāḷu,' i. e. Śāykkāḷu (Śāyāvanam) at the place where the Pōṇṇi (Kāvēri) joins the sea; 'Vāḡṭṭa māḷigai Śāttaru vaṇ-Puḡār-māḷḷ pāṭṭa vāḡṭṭa iḷḡadu polinda' Śāykkāḷu; and 'Puḡāriḷ-Pallavanīśvaram' occurring in Nānasambandar's hymns and Pūṇ-Puḡār-Chēḷāykkāḷu and Kāvīrippāmpaṭṭinattu-Śāykkāḷu found in the hymns of Appar make it clear that both Śāykkāḷu and Pallavanīśvaram were in Kāvīrippāmpaṭṭinam and that the town was near the sea. It is worthy of note that Śāykkāḷu and Śāyāvanam are synonymous. It may also be pointed out that Sundaramūrti-Nāyanār who is later than the other two Saiva saints has not contributed any hymn on the temples at Kāvīrippāmpaṭṭinam, though he has visited places near it and composed hymns on them.

<sup>3</sup> The expression 'Kōḷuvarai iḷḡuda kaḷal-iḷai midakkum Kaḷumala-nagar' occurring in one of the hymns of Nānasambandar, 'alaiyūṇ peru-veḷḷatt-aṇṇu midanda Tōḡipuram' and 'munṇṭriḷ midanda' found in the verses of Appar and 'Kōḷal-kōla midanda kaḷumala vaḷanagar' in the songs of Sundaramūrti furnish evidence on the point. One other reference in Appar's *Dēdram* which says that four or five birds are supposed to have borne the burden of the feet of god at Shiyali on the day when the sea encroached on the land is also of interest.



a place of importance till the 15th century A. D. Then it ceased to be such, partly owing to the silting up of the Kāvêri<sup>4</sup> and partly also to some other causes. The sandy mounds found scattered over several places near the villages of Talsichehēgāḍu, Shiyali and Mēlaip̄perumpallam amply testify to the inundations of the sea. The fragments of brick and tile strewn over the fields near the now insignificant villages round the ruins of Kāvērippattinam indicate the remains of the town founded in later times. Colonel Yule identifies Pattinam with Fattan of the Muhammadan historian Rashidn'uddīn. If anything like the remains of the original city referred to by Ptolemy in the 2nd century A. D. and said to have been destroyed five centuries later, is to be traced at all, it must be by the axe and spade. In other words, it is only excavation on a large scale conducted in a scientific and systematic method, a thing much to be desired, that would enable us to have a peep into the past greatness of the city.

The name Pallavanisvaram, by which one of the temples at Kāvērippūmpattinam was called in the middle of the 7th century A. D., suggests that it should have been either built by a Pallava king or that it came into existence during the time of a Pallava, whose sway was acknowledged in that part of the country where the village was situated. It is even probable that the temple was founded sometime earlier, and in this case, it must have existed in an insignificant form before its construction on a grander scale was undertaken by the Pallava king. We do not know to which of the Pallavas the construction of the temple of Pallavanisvaram should be ascribed, but we can assign it with a good deal of probability to Narasimhavarman I., the contemporary of Nānasambandar, because excepting him none other of the line claims to have conquered the Chōlas.

Such have been the fortunes of the city, which, at the time of Karikāla, one of the greatest sovereigns of the Chōla dynasty, became the principal town of the empire. This king was not unaware of its advantageous position for trade. Accordingly, he appears to have improved it to a considerable extent by building warehouses and appointing officers to collect the dues to government on the articles exported from and imported into the country.<sup>5</sup> It is not unlikely that the seat of Government was removed by Karikāla to this place from Uraiyūr, which he is said to have abandoned, finding perhaps that it was not a central place and had not so much in its favour to be the capital of the empire as the flourishing port of Kāvērippūmpattinam. Karikāla was certainly one of the most powerful Chōla kings that ruled from the city and his name is even to the present day known throughout the Tamil country, and even in the Telugu districts that of a great monarch who looked to the welfare of the subjects entrusted to his care and as a patron of letters.

Inscriptions that mention him are indeed very few, but certainly not fewer than those that refer to the other great kings of the line. Except for the mere mention of him, Chōla inscriptions do not throw much light on the events connected with his reign. This is because we have not as yet obtained any copper-plate grant relating to the dynasty to which Karikāla belonged, all the charters discovered hitherto being only those of the revived Chōla line started by Vijayālaya in about the 9th century A. D. Nor are we in possession of the facts which brought an end to the earlier line. It is not even known who the last great sovereign was. But there is not much doubt, however, that the Pallava expansion in the south and the establishment of the Chālukyas were some of the causes which might have contributed to this end, not to say the effeminacy and weakness of some of the Chōla kings, who do not appear to have persisted in maintaining their ground against the advancing northern powers. The Udayēndiram plates of the Gaṅga-Bāṇa king Prithivipati II. Hastimalla place Karikāla

<sup>4</sup> Above, Vol. VII. p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> See *Pattinappattai*.



between Killi and Kōcheṇṇaṇṇāṇ, while the Leyden plates mention him prior to Kōcheṇṇaṇṇāṇ and Killi. Both the Eastern Chālukyas and Telugu Chōlas, whose copper-plate charters are not few, claim descent from Karikāla and the importance of these will be discussed later on. Though the materials furnished by inscriptions regarding his reign are scanty, yet there is no room for complete disappointment, for the literature of the early Tamils has on record many a reference, which could be of use to the students of history.

The exact time when this king flourished is not given either in the copper-plates which mention him or in the Tamil works which describe his times. Scanty as the materials are for settling the question of his date, the approximate period to which this king should be ascribed can fairly be made out by a consideration of certain facts and events connected with his reign. These are:—

- (1) The battle at Vaṇṇil, where Karikāla defeated the Chēra and the Pāṇḍya kings.
- (2) Karikāla ruled from Kāñchi, which he made new with gold.
- (3) The fight with Trilōchana-Pallava, whom he is said to have defeated.
- (4) He brought a number of families from the Gangetic valley and settled them in the several districts of Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam.
- (5) Karikāla was an ally of Avanti and an overlord of Vajra and Maghada.
- (6) He figures among the early ancestors of the Telugu-Chōḍa chiefs and the Chōlas.

Copper-plate charters of the Telugu-Chōḍa chiefs attribute to Karikāla the building of high banks to the Kāvēri river and the conquest of Trilōchana-Pallava.<sup>6</sup> It may be stated that the former of these events is mentioned in the Tiruvālaṅkāḍu grant.<sup>7</sup> The statement that Karikāla ruled from Kāñchi making it new with gold might be taken to show either that the Pallavas had not settled themselves yet at Kāñchi, or that the Chōla king's conquest of them gave him its possession. The conquest of Trilōchana-Pallava attributed to Karikāla suggests that the latter is more probable. It is not known, however, which king among the Pallavas bore the surname Trilōchana. Whoever he was, he is also said to have been defeated by the Western Chālukya Vijayāditya, who, in spite of the victory, is reported to have lost his life in the encounter.<sup>8</sup> As Vijayāditya, with whom the Pallava contemporary of Karikāla had to fight, is considered to be the immediate predecessor of Pulakēśin I, and as the initial date of Pulakēśin is fixed at A. D. 550, Vijayāditya has to be assigned to the earlier half of the 6th century A. D. And this must also be the time, when the Chōla king Karikāla flourished. It may be noted that Vijayāditya was a king of northern India and came from Ayōdhya in quest of a dominion in the south. We are not informed if Trilōchana-Pallava met his two opponents in the same battle or in different encounters. If the Tamil work *Toṇḍamaṇḍalasaḍagam* can be relied upon, we may perhaps infer that Karikāla had something to do with the kings of northern India, whence Vijayāditya also came. Here we find that Karikāla brought a number of Śūdra families from the Gangetic valley (and on that account said to belong to the *Gaṅga-kula*), settled them in the 24 districts (*kōṭṭam*) of Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam, and bestowed on them rich gifts.<sup>9</sup> This fact and the subsequent settlement of the Western Chālukyas in southern India on a more or less firm footing might perhaps be adduced to show that Trilōchana-Pallava had to meet the combined forces of Karikāla and Vijayāditya, and that the two last were on some terms of alliance, which are not quite plain. It is not unlikely, that some of the northern powers joined one side or the other. In this connection it is worthy of note that Karikāla is represented in the Tamil work *Silappadigāram* as an ally of Avanti, which is Ujjain in Malwa,<sup>10</sup> and as the overlord of Vajra and Maghadha.<sup>11</sup> It looks as if Karikāla was

<sup>6</sup> P. 17 of the *Annual Report on Epigraphy for 1900*.

<sup>7</sup> *Annual Report on Epigraphy for 1906-07*, p. 67.

<sup>8</sup> *Bombay Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Part II, p. 346.

<sup>9</sup> Stanza 97, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. IV, p. 246 and Vol. VI, p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> *agadha* denotes Southern Bihar in Lower Bengal.



instrumental in permanently settling the Western Chálukyas in southern India. The defeat of the Chêra and the Pāṇḍya on the plains of Veṅṅil, and the confederacy of nine potentates and the Pallavas in some unnamed places should have left Karikāla as the undisputed lord of the Dekkan. The Chêra king defeated by him was Sêramān Peruñchêral Âthan. He received a wound on his back and is said to have sought a voluntary death rather than being a monument of disgrace to his family.<sup>12</sup> That even the people of the Telugu districts acknowledged his sway is gathered from the fact that Karikāla figures among the early ancestors of the Telugu Chôḍa chiefs and the Chôḷas. Inscriptions of the Chôḷas are found in the Cuddapah and Bellary districts.

If the date we have now arrived at for Karikāla prove correct, it will be seen that Kanakasabhai Pillai was wrong in identifying him with Killi who died at Kurāppalli. His identification was based on taking *Perumḍaḷavan* as a surname both of Karikāla and Killi. *Perumḍaḷavan* means the great Chôḷa and as such it might be applied to any monarch of the Chôḷa line. To show the incorrectness of the identification, we have only to point out that Kurāppalli-tuñjiṇa-Killi was a contemporary of the Pāṇḍya kings Neḍuñjeliyaṇ and Ugra-Pernuvaludi, who died at Madura and appear to have lived nearly a century later.<sup>13</sup> It is also worthy of note that none of the poets who were contemporaries of Karikāla figures among the contemporaries of Kurāppalli-tuñjiṇa-Killi, Ugra-Pernuvaludi or Neḍuñjeliyaṇ.

A word about Karikāla's parentage, which deserves to be mentioned here. He was the son of Iḷaṇjēcheṇṇi called also Iḷaṇjēṇṇi or Iḷaiyōṇ. This name means "the young Chôḷa" or "the young prince." He was perhaps the heir apparent to the Chôḷa throne and hence was known by that appellation. It may be noted that Iḷaṇcheṇṇi or Iḷaiyōṇ is something similar to *Iḷaṅḡ*, *yuearāja* or *Iḷavaraiu*. There is nothing to warrant our presuming that Iḷaṇjēcheṇṇi was a king of the Chôḷa dominions. He seems to have distinguished himself in the wars undertaken by the reigning king who, we might suppose, was his elder brother. The title *Urueappalvēr*, which we find prefixed to his name, shows that he resembled a lion in prowess. Sometimes the name Iḷaṇjēcheṇṇi is connected with *Neydalaṅḡṇal* which perhaps denotes that the tract of country over which he was the lord, bordered on the sea and it was, most probably, near the mouth of the Kāvêri river. He married a daughter of Aḷundūr-vēḷ. Aḷundūr is perhaps identical with Têr or Tiruv-Aḷundūr near Māyaveram. He is credited with having defeated in battle the Chêra king of his day and taken from him a place called Pāmaḷār.<sup>14</sup> Kuḍakkō-Neḍuñjêral Âthan might be the person vanquished by him as we know that he was his contemporary.

From what has been said above, it will be evident that the accession of Karikāla to the Chôḷa throne is not quite regular, as he had no claims to it, if the reigning king had any issue. There are also grounds for inferring that on the death of Karikāla's predecessor, there were several claimants to the Chôḷa throne and Karikāla succeeded in getting it through the aid of his uncle Irumbiḍar Talaiyār. The story that an elephant from Tirukkaḷumalam put a garland on Karikāla's neck, carried him on its back and placed him on the Chôḷa throne when he was stationed at Karuvūr perhaps tells the same fact. It is worthy of note that this story is quite similar to another recorded about Mūrti-Nāyaṇār, one of the Saiva devotees who was raised to the rank of a Pāṇḍya king, when the Pāṇḍya country had no sovereign. If the interpretation of the name Karikāla is 'scorched leg', it is not unlikely that in the endeavour to get the kingdom, Karikāla happened to meet with an accident in which one of his legs was scorched.<sup>15</sup> Karikāla married the daughter of a *Vēḷir* chief of Nāḷgūr. A village of this name is celebrated in the Vaishṇava work *Nāḷiyiraprabandham*. Inscriptions state that it was

<sup>12</sup> The poets Kalāttalaiyār and Veṅṅi-Kuyattiyār refer to this king in *Puganāṇḍra*, stanzas 65 and 66.

<sup>13</sup> *Vide ante* Vol. XL, pp. 224 ff. "Date of Maduraikkāṇḍi and its hero."

<sup>14</sup> *Pugan*, stanzas 10 and 203.

<sup>15</sup> Another way of interpreting the name is 'he (who is) death to the elephants (of his enemies)'. In this case the name shows how powerful he was. If Karikāla is the name, it means 'the destroyer (of the evils) of the Kali (age).'



the headquarters of a subdivision in ancient times. Tiraveṅgāḍu and Kāvīrīpūmpattinam were places situated in it. It seems, therefore certain, that Kil-Nāṅgūr in the Shiyali *taluka* is identical with it. It is, therefore, no wonder that Karikāla had a special liking for Kāvīrīpūmpattinam, that it was only three or four miles from Nāṅgūr whence his queen hailed.

He might probably have witnessed the annual destruction which the Kāvīrī river caused when it overflowed its banks during high floods and it may have led him to undertake the stupendous work of constructing high banks to the river to prevent the recurrence of the evil. By the way, it may be said that the irrigation of the Kāvīrī delta had engaged the attention of early Chōla kings. Of the several branches which this river has, the Veṅṇāru and the Araśil date back to times earlier than Karikāla<sup>16</sup> and most of the others are attributable to some of the members of the Chōla dynasty whose names they bear even at the present day.<sup>17</sup> The course of the river seems to have changed at an early date giving rise to a new source of irrigation to the country. Paḷaṅkāvēri was the name by which the original river was known to distinguish it from the new, but it is not known if this diversion of the river was due to natural causes, or if it was the work of any particular person. Paḷaṅkāvēri and Kolliḍam were in existence prior to the 7th century A. D.<sup>18</sup> In spite of the diversion of water in these branches, the Kāvīrī seems to have carried much water and caused damage to the country during floods. Karikāla's services to the country in undertaking to build high banks and in opening new channels to improve the irrigation of the land, cannot be over estimated. The banks are said to measure 1,080 feet in length, 40 to 60 feet in width, and 15 to 18 feet in height. They successfully prevented annual destruction for nearly fifteen centuries by the mere inertia of the storage of materials. It is not unlikely that the bunds constructed by him were improved periodically. In all probability the ancient custom of parcelling out a few acres of land irrigated by the source among a few families who were required to take out fixed quantities of mud or sand from the bed and throw them on the bund every year, was followed in the case of the Kāvīrī also.

We have already referred to the impetus given by Karikāla to commerce and trade and this will appear in better light from the translation of Paṭṭinappālī appended below. The poem was composed by Kaḍiyālūr Rudraṅkappaṇār, who is reported to have received the munificent gift of sixteen *lakhs* of gold pieces as reward for his composition. We have also mentioned that Karikāla's contact with the northern powers gave him an opportunity for settling a number of people in the south. The growth of civilisation during this period seems to have assumed a different turn. The impulse given to art and trade is specially noteworthy. The condition of the people improved to a considerable extent and every effort was made to increase their happiness and prosperity.

#### Extract from Paṭṭinappālī.

The Chōla country was irrigated by the Kāvīrī river which never failed in its supply even when there was no rain. The fields yielded sugarcane from the juice of which jaggery was prepared; big bunches of plantains, coconuts and arecanuts. Mango and palm trees abounded. There were also flower gardens covering large areas. The tanks of the country had high bunds resembling the form of the constellation Makha. Fragrant flowers of a variety of colours were produced near them.

The villages in the country adjoined each other and the houses had large compounds in front where they dried paddy. Here children amused themselves by dragging three-wheeled little cars. The doors of the houses bore tiger marks. The royal palaces were white but soiled by the dust raised by cars and horses which were ever moving in the streets.

<sup>16</sup> The names Veṅṇi-kuyattiyār and Ariśilkiyār assumed by persons indicate the existence of the two branches of the Kāvīrī.

<sup>17</sup> It may be remarked that Viraśōlan, Kīrtimārtāṇḍan (Kīrtimāṇ), Uyyakkopḍāṇ and Muḍigopḍāṇ are the surnames of some of the Chōla kings of the 10th and 11th centuries.

<sup>18</sup> Several inscriptions mention Paḷaṅkāvēri. This and Kolliḍam are referred to in the Dēvānam songs of the 7th century, A. D.



There were big alms houses where large quantities of rice were cooked and served to people resorting to them. Also places where small tanks were made and grass served for cattle. Jaina and Buddhist temples were found in one quarter of the town while in another the Brahmans with plaited hair performed sacrifices and raised volumes of smoke. The Paradavar living near the sea-coast ate *igāl* fish and boiled flesh of tortoises, wore the flowers of *adumbu* and *āmbal* and indulged in setting goats to fight in the open and spacious court-yards. In the *puruchchēri*, i. e. the quarter outside the town low-class people reared pigs and fowls.

On holidays the Paradavar of Pugār abstained from going over the sea to catch fish, allowed their nets to dry on the white sand in front of their low-roofed houses which were built on the sea-shore. They wore the *tālai* flowers and garlands, drank toddy drawn from the palmyra and paddy and amused themselves in dancing around a post in which they invoked the presence of god. Accompanied by their wives they bathed in the high waves of the sea to expiate their sins, then in the fresh water of the river to remove the salt, made images and had other enjoyments throughout the day. And in the night they abstained from drinking, stayed in their high palaces, heard music and witnessed dramatic performances, spent some time in the moonlight and retired with their wives to rest, removing the silk cloths which they wore and putting on thin white robes. Just before the dawn of day they slept on the sands of the shore.

Near the wide streets of the Paradavar and on the sea-shore where the *tālai* flowers abounded there were warehouses with good guards. Things poured in here from all quarters for being stored eventually to be shipped. These, when removed from the warehouse, were stamped with tiger-marks and issued out on payment of a duty. Things landing from ships were similarly stamped with tiger-marks and duty charged. The officers who raised taxes on exports and imports were ever busy in their work.

In the upper stories of their houses, ladies of great beauty gathered near the windows with folded hands and joined palms to witness the festivities made for gods like *muruga*, etc., which passed in the streets of the bazaars, to the accompaniment of music sounded by the *kuḷal*, *yāl*, *muḷam*, *muraṣu*, etc. Their houses were storeyed, had raised pials and large court-yards where cattle played freely. At the gates and on the tops of buildings flags were put up. Men of learning and reputation also put up flags inviting combatants to challenge their skill. Attached to the masts of ships, in the port of Pugār, there were other banners. In the toddy shops in front of which fish and flesh were spread out to dry, there were flags seen hoisting.

To the city were imported horses of good gait, in ships which were propelled by the wind; diamond and gold from Mount Mēru; sandalwood and *agil* from Ooorg; pearls from the southern ocean, coral from the eastern sea; the wealth of the Gangetic region; food-stuffs from Ceylon; eatables from Burma and incense from other places. Thus, the streets of Pugār literally bore the burden of rich merchandise which were imported from several quarters. Here were also streets inhabited by people of various creeds and tongues who had abandoned their towns and settled in this city where they formed new acquaintances and relations. The *ceḷḷār* who cultivated the land and who were the source of prosperity to all classes of people, lived in great numbers.

Not satisfied with the wealth of his own country and what was paid to him as tribute by the feudatory chiefs, the great Chōla i. e. Karikāla whose *kaḷai* touching the crowns of other kings made them bright, and in whose chest the sandal paste was rubbed out by the embrace of his wife and children, started on a tour of conquest with his elephants, horses, etc., destroyed his enemies' regions and killed their army in great numbers. He made the *aruḷḷār* obey his commands and the northern kings wither, caused trouble to the *kuḍavar*, cut away the progeny of *poḍurar* and destroyed the *Iraṅgōvēl*. He destroyed the forests in the Chōla country, inhabited them, converting them into habitable lands, increased the wealth, abandoned *Urandai* with its brilliant palaces, built temples, set up families, opened small and large gates in the huge walls of the city, stored bows and arrows and showed his anger against the Pāṇḍya who was powerful in arms.



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